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ABSTRACT

The discussion of early childhood education for multiply handicapped preschoolers is intended for teachers and concerns certain aspects of educational practice basic to an effective and efficient preschool program and what teachers can do in planning to meet the needs of such children. Broad goals of a preschool program for the multiply handicapped are outlined and an organizational pattern for the program (i.e., scheduling of activities) suggested. Suggestions are also made concerning the planning of activities for both large and small groups. Discussion of individualized teaching focuses upon the determination of behavioral objectives, while discussion of parent involvement suggests ways for planning and initiating programs for parents. Covered are parent visits to school, conferences, progress reports, and parent groups. Attention is also given to the use of consultants, particularly for medical, psychological, and educational consultation, and to the role of research and relationship of researchers to practitioners. (KW)

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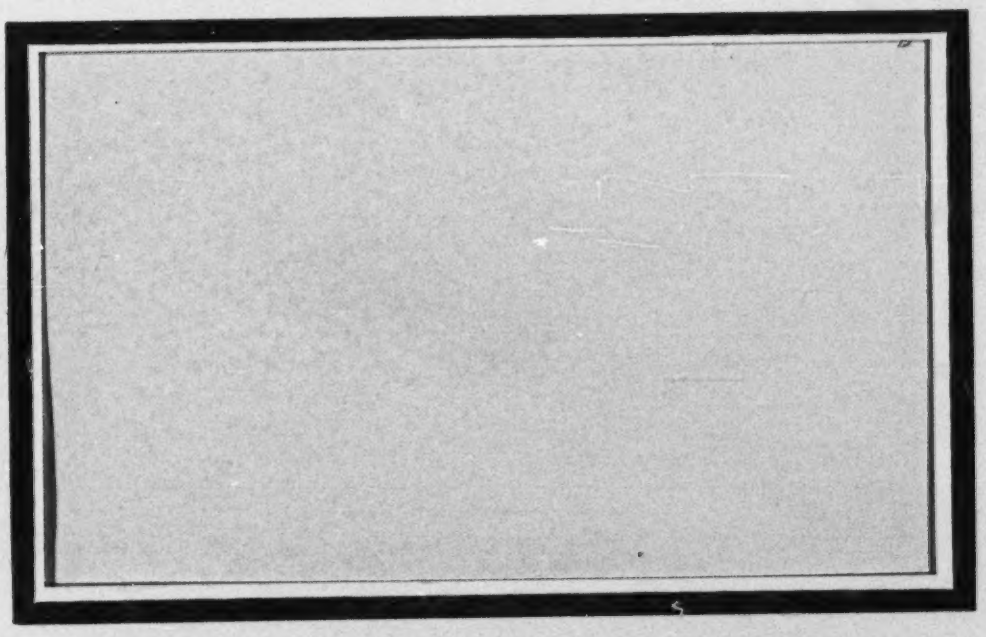

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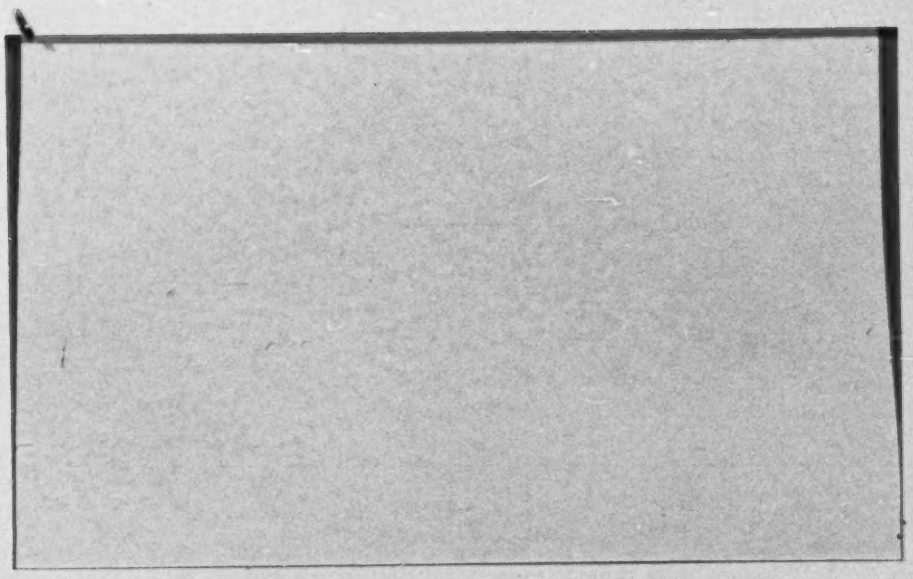

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Jasper Harvey
Project Director

Anne H. Adams
Associate Director

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THE SPECIAL PURPOSE PRESCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

by

Nancy W. Steele, Ph.D.

Vol. I No. 10

Director, Graduate Studies in Visual Disabilities
College of Education, The Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

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Introduction

It does not seem necessary to reiterate the need to provide educational services at the preschool level for children with multiple impairments. Professional educators are acutely aware of the increasing number of children who are identified at an early age in life as having a combination of one or more impairments which may have serious influence upon their growth and development.

Existing preschool programs for the handicapped find the problem of the multi-handicapped child not just a statistic, but a reality. Applications for admission are no longer for those children with a specific, identifiable, and singular handicap...if they ever were! There is also the awareness that without intervention into the sometimes unalterable course of environmental expectancies for the handicapped, these children will suffer serious educational and social deficits. National focus upon the problems of the multiply handicapped child has been instrumental in bringing about planning and services never before offered in such scope to alter these negative expectancies. Innovative programming, flexible methodology, and the individualization of instruction have become the guidelines for educating all children. This is no less true for the child with multiple disabilities.

Modern schools have reportedly assumed responsibility for the "whole child." The fact that a child may deviate considerably from physical, intellectual, and emotional norms does not relieve this responsibility. The situation merely becomes a more complex job of

coordinating services in terms of the needs of the particular "whole child."

Because we are dealing with the child at a younger level, it could be said that problems are more complex and our responsibility more far reaching. On the other hand, if we wait until children are older to begin the broad range of educational services, we are faced with remediation, rehabilitation and re-education rather than initial learning, habilitation and guiding development. Though there are many factors which have influenced the current thrust for preschool education in the area of exceptional children the shift from rehabilitation to habilitation alone is justification for our efforts. Essentially it is a case of beginning at the beginning.

The multiply handicapped child has traditionally been served by agencies other than public education, when a combination of impairments occur in one child, he does not easily fit into special classrooms already in existence. Indeed, clinics, medical and social agencies, and community organizations have been faced with providing a myriad of services which, more often than not, included search for educational placement, rather than education per se. Because traditional special educational services were unable to meet the needs of these children, the first efforts to provide education to the multiply handicapped child began in organizations not specifically set up for this purpose. These agencies usually come into contact with the multiply handicapped child when he is of preschool age. Preschool programs naturally evolved as an attempt to ready the child for placement in existing programs. It soon became apparent that an intensive

and highly specialized intervention, of an educational nature, into the life space of these young children was a reasonable way to meet both their immediate and long term needs.

Ultimately the multi-handicapped child's problem is an educational one. We are a society which believes in teaching, learning, doing for oneself, becoming functional within capabilities and so on. These tasks all come under the general heading of what we call "education." We are then faced with the task of facilitating the growth and development of a group of individuals who may not fit into our usual way of "educating." We might say that this group has "learning problems." This point of view places the responsibility upon the individual who doesn't fit the system. We shall take the position that all individuals can learn. It is a matter of "how much" of "what" can be learned! The height of the corn depends upon the condition of the soil, the amount of fertilizer and the climate. It is as difficult to determine the exact height of the corn stalk when the seeds are put into the ground as it is to estimate the amount of learning which will occur in any single person. We are able to estimate or give our best guess relative to the product under certain conditions for growth or learning. As farmers or teachers we can exercise a degree of control over these conditions which influence the result of our labors. The particular potential of one tiny corn kernal which goes into the ground to await the external conditions which determine its growth is unknown. So it is with children; normal, not so normal, and those quite different. As we have taken the position that learning, to some degree or another, is an attribute of people, providing

the appropriate conditions for learning is the task at hand. This is education. The multiply handicapped child faces an educational problem. His first confrontation with the problem comes when he enters preschool. This is where we must exert our greatest efforts in hopes of averting subsequent years of educational failure - regardless of the conditions which make the child different.

The earlier problem children are identified and placed in a coordinated program of indirect and direct service, the more positive the outlook for his attaining and maintaining adjustment throughout the various stages of his life. A preschool program is the logical first step to this end. A well organized and coordinated service at this level of development can strongly influence the level of attainment in cognitive functioning, social and emotional competence and physical growth and development in later years. A preschool program for multiply handicapped children is also the ideal setting for coordinating the many services which may be necessary to the education of the child.

There will be a limit to the kinds of direct services which can be offered within the program. It will be a rare case when a preschool program has financial resources sufficient to provide its own speech therapist, physical therapist or child psychiatrist. Hopefully, consultive service in these areas will be available when needed, but it is not necessarily the responsibility of the preschool to provide these highly specialized services. The preschool will focus instead upon language development, body use through physical activities and the fostering of an appropriate atmosphere for healthy emotional and social

growth.

The paper which follows deals with some of the aspects of a preschool program for multiply handicapped children. There are suggestions presented relative to the actual operation of the daily program. There are also sections which deal with methods of organizing indirect services to children through consultants and parent involvement. Each section has been written for teachers relative to what they can do in planning these services for children with a combination of problems. This monograph and others will be circulated to between 20 and 30 centers for the young multiply handicapped, sponsored by the "Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act" (PL90-538). It has been written upon invitation by the University of Texas which is assisting in the in-service training of the staff of these centers which have as their special purpose intensive intervention into the lives of children with physical, intellectual and social-emotional deficits.

Various centers have special foci in terms of the kinds of children they serve. However, we are very aware that the presence of one disability increases the probability that additional handicapping conditions are also present or may develop. Even though the children who are brought together for a preschool intervention program may have etiological factors in common, they will exhibit extreme variability in their behavior. We can be assured, however, that they do have some things in common. They are all children, they are of preschool age, and they all are in need of opportunity to develop, to the fullest extent of their capacity, the

social, emotional and intellectual skills for living. For these reasons, this monograph has been designed as a guide for teachers of preschool children, regardless of the special characteristics of the children. Special reference to various conditions is made where applicable or for purposes of example. But, the assumption is made that an effective and efficient preschool program contains certain basic elements necessary to sound educational practice. These elements will be presented in the following sections.

The monograph is not a technical manual; neither should it be followed rigidly as a guide. The ideas presented herein are the result of the writer's experience, training and commitment to intervention programs for young disabled children. It is recognized that the consumers of this material will also bring with them varying kinds of experience and training. However, we can all share the same deep commitment to the task at hand. It is hoped that the ideas and suggestions presented here will stimulate thought, encourage innovative programming and inspire creative teaching.

Nancy W. Steele, Ph. D.

VITA

Nancy W. Steele

Dr. Steele has taught preschool multi-handicapped visually impaired children in public school, and served as School Psychologist at the Tennessee School for the Blind. She worked in Psychological Services at Clover Bottom Hospital and School, Tennessee, where she began the first program for blind retardates in the institution. As part of her doctoral program at George Peabody College for Teachers she was a Research Intern at the American Printing House for the Blind where she studied the reading and listening behavior of low ability children. Dr. Steele is currently in charge of Graduate Studies in Visual Disabilities at The Florida State University. In the Fall of 1970, she will join the American Foundation for Overseas Blind and relocate in New Delhi, India, where she will begin a program for blind children in the local school district.

Goals for a Preschool Program for Multihandicapped Children

The goals of a preschool program for multi-handicapped children are not unlike goals which we hold for any preschool child. The preschool experience is designed to build readiness for the more formal educational experience which usually begins at about age six. As public education in "the grades" has as its major emphasis training in the academic tools, (the three R's), and the processes of inducting information, preschool might be better termed as the pre-academic experience. Schools have taken the responsibility for teaching and providing opportunity for learning the skills of effective living. But too often it is implied that these skills are of an academic nature. Preschool education is therefore an attempt to better prepare children for the system of education which exists and in which they must engage and strive for success. As the majority are able to survive the present educational process we assume that it is adequate. This may not be an accurate assumption. The social order persists, but in today's world we have some reason to question its efficacy and the relevance of the educational system which supports it. Nevertheless, we are faced with preparing children for the system which does exist; we are faced with providing a pre-academic experience.

Preschool programs for children who have a high probability for success in school have a high probability for being effective. Preschool experiences which prepare children for academic learning include activities which purportedly enhance skills of observation, listening,

participation, conforming, manipulation of materials, growth of the physique and language usage. Learning is developmental and systems such as these must have evolved to a point so that the child can profit from formal education. Marked discrepancy in the development of any one of these systems casts doubt upon the effectiveness of a preschool program, as traditionally conceived, and forecasts a low probability of success for the deviant participant. The goals of the pre-academic experience do not change because the individual has developmental discrepancies in one or more of the systems necessary for learning. But the methods of striving for and obtaining these goals may be considerably "deviant" from what is normally operative in a preschool program.

Developmental or growth discrepancies which are so great that the child does not profit from traditional preschool experiences can be the result of many conditions, both physical and environmental. These discrepancies may exist in social and emotional development, intellectual aptitude, and physical ability. They may be the result of sensory deprivation, cultural impoverishment, physical disability, mental retardation or a combination of these. The etiology of these conditions may not be so important as the <u>behavior</u> which they produce. This, after all, is what the teacher must deal with, what she must attempt to remediate. Our task is to reduce the discrepancies in behavior so the child can function with reasonable success in the educational process.

The whole purpose of special education is to provide equal educational opportunity for children who cannot profit from traditional

programs. Special education at the preschool level does not yet assume that children cannot profit from the traditional school programs in "the grades." It is predicated upon the notion that with special intervention children with conditions which cause growth discrepancies may overcome their inadequacies and be able to function in regular school settings. For this reason a preschool program for the handicapped must begin at an early age and must use special techniques which focus upon the individual needs of the children it serves.

The fact that the children we serve may have one or more handicapping conditions may render our task more complex. The demands for greater sensitivity, skillful planning, and creative teaching are obvious, but our goals remain the same. Simply stated, the goal of the preschool for multi-handicapped children is to provide the growth and learning experiences which will allow a child ultimately to function in society as a productive and adjusted individual. Let us make no assumptions relative to our limitations or those of the children. Expectations must be high though tempered with realism. Steps may be small, progress slow, but our goals remain clear.

A Suggested Organizational Pattern of the Preschool Program

A preschool program for multi-handicapped children will share many organizational characteristics of the preschool for non-handicapped children. We have already assumed that the broad general needs of the child with multiple handicaps are not markedly different from those of the normal child, but that our approach to meeting these needs may vary considerably in terms of the particular child. Our approach is, in fact, determined by the particular stage of development at which we encounter the child and the convolutions of his overall growth pattern which his handicap may produce. The assistance we provide the child for reducing discrepancies in development as well as helping him make the adaptations necessary in terms of his particular handicap will occur in a variety of teaching situations. The child is first an individual and he will occasionally receive attention and instruction which are specific to his needs. Secondly, the very fact that a child is engaged in a preschool program constitutes his membership in a fairly large group, usually 20 or 30 children. Smaller groups of children will come together from the large group for various purposes. The preschool program will therefore be planned and organized around individual instruction, small group and large group activities. Because these organizational areas are the basis for instruction in the preschool, they will be discussed in depth in the following section. At this time let us consider scheduling of these activities within the daily program.

The children will probably not arrive all at the same time. Small groups should be organized, perhaps according to who arrives together, for the purposes of toileting, hanging up coats and beginning the school day. By assigning one teacher or aide to every six or seven children, these activities can be done without chaos. When arrival activities are completed, an activity such as puzzles or manipulative games which can be done in small groups would allow the teacher to assist late arrivals or give the extra help some children may need. When all of the children have arrived, language development activities such as sharing time or planned presentation may then follow. The children will be fresh, alert and ready for an instructional activity at the beginning of the day. After this small group presentation, individual follow-up activities or instruction will follow as needed.

After a directed activity in the small group, children should be allowed free time for outdoor play, weather permitting, or activities utilizing large muscles, such as use of wheel toys, climbing, running, active games, etc. There shcuild be space both indoors as well as out for these kinds of activities.

A morning snack is usual for the young child and also offers an opportunity for "settling down" after what may be boisterous play.

At a specific time the children will be called together for a large group presentation. This activity will most likely be based on units of work from the general curriculum. Teachers of the small groups will be responsible for their children as they participate in

the larger group.

Following the large group presentation, children will return to their small groups for follow through activities. Again individual instruction will occur as needed.

As self help skills are essential to the education of the multi-handicapped child, a lunch program should be included if at all possible. The luncheon activity will provide numerous learning activities for the children in addition to the actual skill development of feeding oneself.

After lunch, rest time is in order. Stories may be read to the children or story records played while they relax, on individual cots if possible.

Following a quiet time, small group and individual activities will resume. The groups may not necessarily be made up of the same children as during the morning. Perhaps children will be brought together because of a specific problem area or shared disability. But no matter how the groups are formed, definite goals should be set for this instructional period.

Before departure from school an additional play period or free activity can be included in the schedule.

Of course schedules will vary! The above is outlined only as a guide to show a kind of logical sequence of activities. Not only will schedules vary in terms of the particular preschool program, but they will be modified and changed in terms of the curricular emphasis at any given time. A schedule or daily plan of activities should be set

however, to aid in planning activities for children and so that they can anticipate events which follow one another. Field trips, special visitors and projects will necessitate changes in schedule. These will be taken in stride by both staff and students if activities are well planned and adequate preparation is made before hand. Flexibility is essential; however, an underlying structure to daily activities will facilitate the operation of every aspect of the program.

Adequate time for staff conferences, program planning, formulation of individual behavioral objectives, and inservice training activities are as essential as that time allotted to the children. Without it, the preschool may lack direction and have little opportunity to evaluate, much less plan, its course of action

The following sections will present suggestions for just such staff activities.

Group Activities in the Preschool

Some part of each day should be devoted to an activity in which all the children participate as a group. This kind of experience provides an opportunity for learning the appropriate behavior in such a setting. Such things as sitting quietly, taking turns to speak, performing before the group, listening for information are learned in a natural setting and may provide the basis for a child's behavior patterns throughout his entire school experience. Because the children we are working with may have very limited experiences in these behaviors for a variety of reasons, appropriate participation in a large group may constitute a major goal for the preschool experience. It may be extremely difficult for a child who has suffered the effects of social isolation, to acquire the ability to attend, share and respect the rights of others to do the same. However, if adult leadership is not too autocratic in the sense that "control" is rigidly exercised, the group will develop its own norms of acceptable behavior and help its deviant members to conform and gain acceptance. This is not to say that the teachers will not exercise control nor will they leave the direction of the group experience entirely up to the children. Indeed, very detailed plans are a necessity to cover the numerous eventualities which may occur. It is also true that children must learn to function within a group. This will take time. Keeping this in mind, group activities and interaction should be designed to move toward greater "direction taking" and decision making by the group itself, as this skill develops. It is not unreasonable to expect that even preschool handicapped children will develop skills in decision

making, planning and monitoring of behavior within a group over a period of time.

Planning Group Experience

Group experience and participation may occur when 20 or 30 children are brought together at one time or for only 3 to 5 children. Each of these settings are valuable though the purpose and methods for each are somewhat different. Let us consider each.

Large Group Activities

The large group can provide the vehicle for the overall curriculum in the preschool. It is assumed that creative teachers will select material and activities appropriate to the age and ability levels of the children as well as those related to the general goals of the program. For example, it would be unrealistic to expect that children of this age could meaningfully participate in baking an apple pie. This activity would include paring and coring of apples, making the appropriate measurements, rolling the dough, etc. Observation of the activity being performed by the teacher could provide certain learning experiences --- but the children would surely lose interest before the product was ready for eating. However, it would be meaningful to children to learn what an apple is, its descriptive characteristics, its class membership, and that we eat apples in several forms --- one of which is pie. Within the group of children it is possible that some of the children will learn that it takes about a half-dozen apples to bake a pie, but there may be those children who only learn to say the word apple --- when one is shown to them.

This example points up several factors which must be considered in planning a meaningful large group activity.

Content: The content of the material presented in a group experience must be relevant to the child's immediate environment. The material may be familiar or entirely new to the children, but it should be related to their current level of experiences. A unit on house pets would be more relevant than a unit on jungle animals. Content must also be broad enough to provide something for everyone, but not so broad that specific learning experiences cannot be identified. Individual differences can be provided for in the large group as well as in smaller groups which we shall discuss later. The key is in determining the overall goals of the experience and behavioral objectives for individual participants.

Time Period: The limited attention span of preschool children will naturally restrict the length of time spent in a large group activity. When children become bored because activity does not move fast enough or because they cannot participate, value of the learning experience decreases. Some children will be lost sooner than others and then may disrupt the entire group. The activity must be varied so it maintains interest, yet geared to the understanding of the child. It is necessary to have small enough steps to learning, but not so small that time is wasted or the class interest lost. Good planning will facilitate timing a large group session. A perceptive teacher will know when it is time to terminate an activity or when it may be prolonged. This will take considerable experience with the particular group. Fifteen

or twenty minutes will probably be the maximum time a large group will direct its full attention to a teacher-directed activity, but this will vary.

Continuity and Related Activities: It is extremely important that there be continuity in a unit of work, not only from session to session but from unit to unit. More overall learning will occur when units of work are related and have applicability in the child's life. When a particular unit of work is being culminated, the foundation for the next unit should be carefully laid. Similarly, when a new unit of work is in progress learning from previous units should be reinforced. Activities in small group and individual sessions should be designed to reinforce material presented in the large group. The more related these activities are to large group goals the better the opportunity for reaching these goals. We cannot overemphasize the importance of overall planning for continuity of program throughout the school year.

Small Group Activities

Small groups are a natural setting for follow through activities which emanate from the large group. In many cases, demonstrations will be given the large group which, because of the large number of children, only limited participation by the children is allowed. Carry over of demonstration into small groups of children where they are able to see and manipulate materials individually serves to reinforce learning. The small group is a more circumscribed situation where children can interact relative to a project.

Small groups also provide opportunities for planning and carrying

out projects in which only a few children are involved. Children can be grouped for special purpose instruction such as a self help skill. Grouping can be based on common developmental level relative to a learning task. It may even be necessary to bring certain children together because of special adaptations of materials. But special attention should be paid to the reason the group is formed. In other words, what is the objective, both generally and individually, for the children who work together. When this is clear the basis for grouping the children in a particular way will be clear.

The small group can be a vehicle for many activities. It is possible that a particular group would not change membership if it has been constituted for a specific purpose. Other groups will change daily having rather loose membership depending upon the project at hand or the particular reason for having the children work together. Regardless of why the group is formed or how its membership changes, teachers should be very aware of the dynamics within its membership and constantly evaluate its movements toward goals which have been established.

Group goals will eventually give way to individual behavioral objectives based on the child's needs, competencies and his particular disabilities. These individual behavioral objectives can only be determined by careful assessment of the child. Assessment must therefore include how the child functions in the cognitive, affective and physical domains both individually and in a group. More simply, how he thinks and learns, how he feels about himself and others and how

he handles his body in the environment. Small group activities are ideal for providing the opportunity for this kind of observation and assessment of both strengths and weaknesses.

Individualized Teaching Activity

Because of the children in our "special purpose preschool" may have one or more physical or mental deficits which label them as multi-handicapped, it is automatically assumed that most of the activities and instruction will be highly individualized. This is largely true. However, it has already been pointed out that group activities for a fairly large number of children as well as those designed for just a few have a great deal of value for both teaching and diagnostic purposes. How often have we heard it said by teachers of exceptional children that their classrooms are made up of as many "groups" as there are children. Even in a regular school or classroom where grouping is done to allow for individual differences, there is a wide diversity between children on any number of levels, i.e., social, emotional, intellectual or cultural. It has been discovered that grouping children according to commonalities on any one of these characteristics may have only limited utility when considering the individual child (Smith, 1969). As our knowledge of neurological functions, learning strategies and behavioral patterns broaden, it becomes evident that extreme heterogeneity exists among children no matter how they are classified. The sum of the parts is considerably more complex than the intricacies of each of these systems. Modern educational theory is consequently focusing upon methods of grouping children for teaching purposes which take into account these complex behavioral systems rather than useless labels based only on identifiable physical or intellectual stigmata. The shift is then from the medical model of diagnosis and treatment of

exceptional children to the more operational behavioral model. For example, visual acuity and etiological factors of blindness offer less information for deciding whether a child should read in print or braille than does a behavioral description of how well the child uses what vision he has. In addition, such physical measures as visual acuity and etiology can imply static conditions. Barraga (1964) has shown that the visual efficiency and measured acuity can be improved in children with extremely low vision by training them "how to see." By adhering to a behavioral definition of disability and classifying children accordingly, we can remain flexible in curriculum and teaching methodology.

Grouping is done largely for purposes of efficiency. We are nevertheless faced with the fact that there will be those times when the most efficient method of reaching a goal for a particular child is to remove him from the group and give highly individualized instruction. In the traditional school setting, we think of individualized instruction for particular activities such as speech therapy, counseling, or remediation. This will also be true for the special purpose preschool, but even more specific instructional goals for learning can be set and worked toward due to the ratio of teachers to children. Children may be taken from group activities on a regularly scheduled basis or as the need arises. But regardless of how individual time with a child is accomplished careful planning and goal setting is as essential as in the larger group activities.

Determining Behavioral Objectives

The preschool for children with multiple disabilities will have a number of general goals. These have been discussed in an earlier section. This type of goal setting process is necessary but does not assure that individual children will grow, develop and overcome physical or environmental handicaps. For example, we may state that one of the general goals of the preschool is to provide opportunity for group participation in a number of learning experiences. Provision of opportunity is all well and good but we must be able to demonstrate the degree to which individuals profit from these group experiences. This leads us to the formation of individual behavioral objectives for the participants in the group as a whole.

There has been a great deal of emphasis upon behavioral objectives for school children of all ages in the past few years. Mager (1962) has provided an excellent programmed text for instructing teachers to formulate and evaluate behavioral objectives. Simply our task is this: To simply state, in behavioral terms, what it is we wish children to do as a result of training and/or experience. This also involves breaking down component behaviors into a sequence of operations which constitute a skill or act. If we wish a child to say "shoe" in the presence of the object or a representation of the object such as a picture, there are certain identifiable behaviors involved. The child must be able to attend or look at the object. He must be able to emit the blend 'sh', and the dipthong 'oe', in correct combination in the presence of an object we easily recognize as a covering for the foot.

But we wish cognitive recognition as well. Is the child able to generalize the word "shoe" to different shaped, sized and colored shoes? Does he know on which part of the body it is worn? We measure the child's understanding of a concept by his ability to give it a label in the presence of the stimuli and to demonstrate a use or uses of the object. We can objectively define what constitutes understanding of a concept and then evaluate whether or not the behavior of an individual meets the criterion we have set. This process of identifying objectives and specifying the criterion behaviors which constitute their accomplishments can be used for the simplest to the most complex behaviors necessary to various aspects of living. An objective is set, its component parts are identified, and the behaviors which demonstrate accomplishments are specified. The teacher's job is then clear. Not only is there a clear cut objective, the evaluation component is built into the process. At first this process may seem mind tickling and time consuming. However, once the teacher becomes facile in operation, her teaching will take on new dimensions of efficiency and effectiveness.

Behavioral objectives may be set for one or many children. As we have mentioned there will be general objectives for all of the children. Ultimately, however, each child must be evaluated in terms of accomplishment. We ask, "Does the child demonstrate by his behavior that he has reached the objective set for him?" It becomes clear that this process is an efficient way of determining educational program and of evaluating its effectiveness.

The developmental needs of individual children may be programmed

through setting behavioral objectives. We assume that numerous and varied developmental discrepancies exist within the group we serve. The operation of the general program will serve as a diagnostic situation from which we identify the needs of individuals and subsequently set behavioral objectives for them. Some children may need special help in learning to attend within the large group activities. Others may need specific skill building in eating behavior or other self help tasks. These needs will become apparent as we work with children. By setting objectives for behavior the course of individual instruction will evolve through creative use of methods and materials by teachers. Teachers will already have a wealth of experience to bring to these settings, but they will also have opportunity to experiment with new, innovative strategies. What is more, they will have an objective system of evaluation of these strategies and rationale for using them in other settings with other children. The teacher is a researcher. She asks questions, administers treatment, compares results, evaluates and replicates. The extent to which this is done efficiently and then applied effectively is the essence of the teaching/learning process!

At some point soon after the beginning of the preschool program, the staff should devise individual behavioral objectives for each member of the group. Periodic evaluation of each child relative to the goals set for him will follow. We learn as we work with children. Therefore, these evaluation periods should not be spaced too far apart. Monthly or bi-monthly review of progress is not too frequent. This process should include review of behavioral objectives for each child

in terms of how close his behavior matches that goal we have set. This evaluation may then necessitate a restatement to more nearly match the capacities of the child. Perhaps we will have been too global in our objectives. The aequence of behavior must then be looked at to see where the child is and if there needs to be more emphasis on component behaviors. For example, if the objective has been to "learn to tie shoes," and the child cannot yet adequately manipulate shoe strings, we must focus upon the component behavior of folding, and crossing strings. This might be accomplished by a number of activities designed to develop fine muscle coordination. Gross muscle development proceeds this behavior and we may have to abandon, at least temporarily, activities involving small muscles in favor of more general development. Learning is developmental and the child must be physiologically and intellecutally ready to achieve the sequential tasks basic to more complex skills. By evaluating progress we will gain insight into where the child is in his development and what skills should be taught at that point in time.

On the other hand, we may find through our evaluation of behavioral objectives that a child has achieved the goals we have set for him. The task is then to formulate new objectives and begin on programming for their accomplishments. The progress evaluation process in terms of behavioral objectives provides a dynamic system of planning and executing instructional programs for children and allows teachers to individualize instruction relative to needs.

The process of determining behavioral objectives for children may seem difficult and time consuming at first to teachers who have not used this approach. In the long run it saves time by providing focus

for our efforts. It may be helpful during the initial stage of using this approach to count in a consultant who is well versed in the process to assist staff members in learning to objectify their goals for children. Nearby **universities** are a good source for such specialists if there is not someone in the local school system who can provide the service.

In conclusion of the section, let us review some of the pcints made relative to individualized teaching activity. We must first view the multi-handicapped children with whom we work as individuals who do have common needs, but who may fulfill these needs in many different ways. We must respond as teachers to their abilities and disabilities from a behavioral standpoint. What is it we wish children to do as a result of the learning experience provided them? By specifying goals and the criteria of behavior leading to these goals we design our instructional course which has built-in evaluation components. Periodic review of an individual's progress toward accomplishment of goals may necessitate modification of behavioral objectives or the setting of new ones. Teachers may need help from educational consultants who have expertise in this process during initial stages, but it is sure that the process will prove to be an effective and efficient way of programming for children.

Parent Involvement

The role of the parent in a preschool program for multiply handicapped children is determined by a number of factors. The policies and practices of the school will have the major influence upon the quality and quantity of parent involvement. Regular contact with the parent or guardian of the child will be initiated by the school for the purpose of reporting progress throughout the program. It is also expected that there will be a number of special purpose interviews with parents for obtaining necessary information about the child and his family. This kind of contact will occur most frequently when the child enters school, but there will be times throughout the year when meetings with one or both parents are indicated. When centers are carrying out in-house research projects or those in conjunction with nearby colleges and universities, additional parent involvement and cooperation may be necessary. Individual centers will have their own plan for involving parents which will be directly related to their particular program, staff, and parent population.

The nature of the parent group is also a factor which influences the role parents will assume in a program. We can assume that parents will initiate a great deal of contact with the school themselves. Their interest and participation may be limited due to employment, responsibility to other children in the home and even factors as mundane as transportation. But, parents <u>will</u> want to know what is happening to their children. It is, therefore, a primary responsibility

of the school to organize effective communication lines between the home and the school.

Much can be said about why effective communication must go on between parents and professionals. Perhaps the most important reason for the interchange is to provide the basis for carry over in the home of the skills taught to children and the management techniques found to be most effective with them. This can be a two way street for many parents will have worked extensively with their own children and will continue to do so even though he is in a school program. We must encourage this kind of action, but we must also be aware of what is being done so efforts will be coordinated. It would be unrealistic to expect that parents can be trained to the extent that an ideal environment will be available to children 24 hours a day. How competent we would be as educators if we had the gift to plan every detail of an environment that would be ideal. How fortunate our exceptional children would be! But our paper idealism must be flavored with the reality of what we can do with the limitations of both preschool program and home environment. To be sure, the task we set for ourselves during the brief time we have the children will be a challenge to all of the skill, talent, and creativity we can muster. Parents must, therefore, be used creatively as they represent an invaluable resource as we approach goals for children in the program. Parents are looking for help and will give help. But they must be guided, taught, supported and efficiently managed as resource persons.

It may be surprising how naive some parents are about the behavior

and potential of their multi-handicapped child. Such factors as socio-economic level, educational and intellectual level, prior associations with other agencies and general emotional stability strongly effect the degree of parent sophistication found in any one group. It is also doubtful that there will be homogeneity in the group on any one of these factors. As educators of exceptional children, we are well acquainted with individual differences. These differences must also be accounted for in our dealings with parents. When appropriately organized, parent involvement in a preschool program can be a tremendous asset. Parents can quickly and enthusiastically learn new and more effective ways of working and living with their multi-handicapped children. It has been found that as a child changes, the reactions of those around him also change. These reactions can be both positive and negative. Rather than leaving to chance the nature of these changes, careful planning of parent involvement will be mutually benefitting to the child, the program and the home setting.

The following sections will deal with suggested ways for planning and initiating programs for parents.

General Atmosphere

Parents should be encouraged to visit and support the school. An open door policy may be called for during the first stages of the program while both children and parents are being oriented to the whole idea of school. But, this kind of policy can cause innumerable problems if allowed to continue indefinitely. The enthusiasm and interest of some parents may cause them to take valuable "school time" discussing

individual problems. Sufficient orientation with parents before the child enters the program can eliminate some of the confusion which can occur. It is extremely important that the daily routine be maintained and that it run smoothly when the children are beginning what may be an entirely new experience to them. The experience may also be novel to parents which may cause some insecurity. However, setting limits in both parents and children and building acceptable behavior patterns is better early, than too late! Orientation to parents will be given individually when initial contact is made about a child entering the program. It would also be very helpful to have a group meeting of all parents for explaining policies of the school, its general purpose and plans for coming activities. In a meeting such as this parents can ask questions and clarify their general responsibilities. A meeting such as this also gives them an opportunity to meet other parents of multi-handicapped children.

Initial Parent Visitation

It is suggested that the program begin with a nucleus of three or four children and that new children be added, two or three at a time, over a two or three week period. Depending upon the child, parents can be invited to attend with their children for the first hour or so of class if it seems necessary. Some children have no difficulty leaving Mama to join in an exciting new experience. But there will be those for whom the separation will be quite difficult. This may be particularly true for young, over-protected, handicapped children. The reassuring presence of a parent can be an asset to the child's adjustment to school.

However, prolonged dependency can delay group participation and membership. A few minutes at the beginning of the day during the initial stages may be all that is necessary. This practice should not be allowed to continue over a long period of time. The parent should be helped to see that it is not truly necessary for him to be in school. There must be adequate numbers of staff to provide for the needs of each child and carry out the planned activities of the day. If a mother sees that there is no one to give her child comfort, assistance or attention when it is necessary, she will be more reluctant to leave these responsibilities to others. Unfortunately, not all mothers will show this degree of concern for their children. For some it will be a relief to have the heavy load of care for a problem child lifted from their shoulders. But regardless of what the mothers' attitudes may appear to be we want them to feel confident that their children will have special care while in school. Mutual communication is based on an atmosphere of trust and appreciation.

After an initial "open door policy" for parent visitation to the school, it should be made clear that announced visits may interfere with ongoing service to the children. Parents should be encouraged to make an appointment to talk over problems and progress. There will be those times when there is an immediate need for a brief conference. If one staff member can be freed of direct responsibility to children during the arrival time, these talks can be placed without interfering with the program. It is a good idea to have certain children assigned to specific staff members so that they will be met and led into the

daily routine immediately upon their arrival. This routine may simply include hanging coats, hand washing, and free play. But the building of a routine can enhance the child's ability to adjust to the new situation. Parents will then be free to talk with the "free teacher" as well as observe their child as he begins his school day. If a parent wants to talk with a specific staff member, the free teacher can take responsibility for her group of children. This same kind of arrangement would also work at the end of the day when parents come to take their children home. Departure from school should be smooth and orderly processed, which may not be possible without some way of handling "on the spot" conferences. Regulating the visits of the parents to the school is not an attempt to exclude them, but rather to include them in an organized manner and assure that these interactions will be helpful to the individual without being detrimental to the program.

Individual Conferences with Parents

There will be occasions when individual conferences with parents, of a more formal nature than mentioned above, are indicated. Parents will seek conference time for a variety of reasons and these can be dealt on the basis of situational need. But it is also expected that the school will talk with parents on a regular basis and for particular reasons. The nature of some of these conferences are discussed below.

First Interview

The first time a representative of the school and the parents of a multiply handicapped child meet will be for the purpose of discussing placement of the child in the school. This meeting can occur at the school

or in the home. The school organization may be such that a particular person handles all initial parent interviews but it is recommended that several staff members see the child before deciding upon placement. If the initial contact is made at the school, it is suggested that a home visit soon follow. Seeing parents and children in the home can give valuable information and insights into individual program planning for the child. A brief summary of these contacts should be placed in the child's folder for later reference.

The initial interview should be somewhat informal so parents will feel free to discuss their children. Observation of the parent-child interaction can be useful. It is important to give as much information as possible about the program to the parents, as is gleaned about the child and his family. The school needs to know what the child's problems are; the parents want to know what the preschool proposes to do about them. Good continuing relationships are based upon how these questions are asked and how they are answered.

Regular Progress Reports

Regular progress records will be kept on each child in the program. It is essential that progress of children also be communicated to the parents so these can be carried over into the home. Parents must be helped to know how to facilitate the work of the school and open new doors for learning in both settings. Unless home and school work together, efforts on both parts can be conflictive and yield little. Written progress reports may be issued one or two times during the year; however, face to face discussion is very meaningful and informative.

Talking with an understanding teacher who knows and works with "their child" gives parents an opportunity to ventilate feelings and gain support in their efforts. Such an encounter may be equally supporting for the teacher!

The school should decide upon some specific time interval for individual progress conferences and make every effort to maintain the conferences scheduled. The size of the group and the number of staff will determine this interval, but progress conferences every 10 or 14 weeks are not unreasonable. Special purpose conferences may be called as they are needed, but every effort should be made to develop and maintain a close relationship with the home through the progress conferences.

Both parents should be included in the conference when at all possible. The Lead Teacher or the teacher who works most closely with the child should call the conference and act as "host" if other staff members are included. This person should carry out this responsibility throughout the year so the parents can identify with her. This will allow parents to build a relationship with a particular person in a center of many staff members and also assure some degree of continuity in the progress reporting.

Parent Groups

Group meetings of parents can be organized for several purposes. A good deal of parent education can take place in a group such as this. The group atmosphere will also lend support to parents who seem to face what may appear to them insurmountable problems. There is no equal

to this mutual support parents can give one another.

It is suggested that parents be allowed to organize their group as they wish and that the school participate only as members, not leaders. Some guidance and assistance may be necessary, but the group will be infinitely more productive if it is parent oriented and operated.

Parents may wish to get suggestions for programs. These can include speakers from the school or other sources. It is also probable that the parent group may wish to assume some project to assist the operation of the preschool. There are always jobs to be done. This may include painting, building simple equipment, making or producing certain materials. With proper guidance from the school, these projects can build strong support of the school and its purposes not only among the parents of the children it serves, but within the community.

A broad spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, ability and interest should be anticipated in a parent group of multi-handicapped children. The fact that the children share diverse problems will assure equal diversity among the parents. Care should be taken to include as many parents as possible and this will mean a wide variety of projects and programs so all will feel comfortable in their participation. Careful planning on the part of parent leaders with guidance from the school can develop a productive and useful organization for each of its members and for the program as a whole.

Use of Consultants

There are a number of professional and paraprofessional persons in any community who can be of invaluable service to the preschool program. These people may be formally engaged as consultants for which they receive a fee for their service. Others will give consultation as part of their jobs with local or state educational agencies. Still others will volunteer their service simply because of interest in the project. A wise director will cultivate the interest of professionals in the community who can offer various services to the project. There is often money for consultation service, but this may be limited, and hence, wisely spent. Donated or volunteer services release funds for other consultation which must be purchased.

A great deal of planning must go into the wise use of a consultant's time. Too often school projects do not get their money's worth from consultive service. This is not due to incompetence on anyone's part, but rather a failure to plan so that valuable time may be wisely spent.

Before discussing various kinds of consultive service and the role of the consultant, it is pertinent to make some general comments.

1. A specific task or tasks should be identified well in advance of calling in a consultant and related to him.

2. A flexitle time schedule should be drawn up so that these specific goals of the consultation can be reached.

3. Every effort should be made to contact a consultant who can give the particular service needed.

4. As many of the staff should be included in consultation as is feasible. We learn from the experts. Though consultations may be specific to a child or situation, there is usually general application of the information presented.

Types of Consultation

Medical Consultation may be particularly helpful due to the rather diverse group of children who will attend the preschool project. A medical doctor or specialist can be engaged to review the medical records of the children for the purpose of interpreting behavioral correlates to the specific conditions of the children. Educators cannot be expected to have a thorough understanding of medical terminology, but an interpretation of this information may be essential to understanding how the child functions. For example, if a child has a history of seizures it is important for his teachers to know how to recognize the symptoms which may precede such an occurrence. If medication is used to control seizures, how often is it given; how does it effect the behavior? What should be done if a seizure occurs? The orthopedic physician can suggest activities which will aid the child with physical handicaps. The opthalmologist and optometrist can help teachers to understand the visual behavior of children and offer activities which will foster good visual development. The physical therapist may have suggestions which will foster physical development in the children. A broad application of knowledge from many areas will aid in developing a comprehensive program.

Public health service and volunteer groups used for visual and

auditory screening procedures can also be considered medical consultation. Local school programs often offer dental clinics as well. These clinics and screening procedures should be an integral part of any school program, and especially so when children have been identified as having multiple disabilities. "An ounce of prevention..."

Psychological Consultation. The services of a psychologist will be invaluable to the special purpose preschool. It is desirable, though not totally necessary, to have individual intelligence measures on all of the children. In addition to testing and interpreting test data, the psychologist can offer consultation in a number of areas. Not all psychologists have the same kinds of specialties, but with some investigation, an appropriate person for the need can usually be found. The following is a list of subject areas which will be useful to the teachers as they work with children day by day. These are areas of competency found among people in the field of psychology and suggested topics for inservice meetings.

Areas for Psychological Consultation

Contingency Management: Control of behavior by using high probability behavior to reinforce low probability behavior in children; a classroom management technique.

Behavior Modification: The use of reinforcement techniques to change or modify behavior. This technique can be used in teaching skills and in controlling behavior.

Cognitive Styles and Learning Strategies: Children differ in the way they approach learning tasks. An awareness of these differences can increase sensitivity in teaching.

Informal Assessment Techniques: Teachers are in an ideal setting to assess learning and behavioral development in children. They do not need to be sophisticated in psychological measurement,

but they should be helped to understand basic principles involved. A psychological consultant can suggest techniques and aid in interpretation of results.

Child Growth and Development: An awareness of the patterns of development in children in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains will make us sensitive to the growth descrepancies which exist in our students. Knowledge in this area will be particularly helpful in determining behavioral objectives for individuals and for the program as a whole.

As the program progresses many other needs will become apparent that may be met by a psychological consultant. It should be kept in mind that psychologists have many skills other that testing and interpretating test data. They can be a valuable resource to the program. A particular service they can render is discussed later in the section on the Research Component within the preschool.

Educational Consultation. There are resources for educational consultation which may be available without charge to the special purpose school. Many of these have no doubt been identified and an agreement of cooperation arranged during the proposal stage of the project. Companies which produce educational materials may also have consultants who will visit programs upon request. If persons with expertise in a particular area are not immediately known, state departments of education or universities can be contacted for suggestions.

As when using any consultant, it is best to have the task specified when an expert is invited to help teachers become more proficient. The need for additional information in special teaching areas will become clear as the program progresses. The following list of general areas in which educational consultants can be of service may stimulate

recognition of other needs in terms of the particular group of children being served.

Areas of Educational Consultation

Language Development: This is a major area of concern within the preschool curriculum. New and innovative programs and materials will stimulate creativity on the part of the staff. A specific program may not be adopted entirely, but rather methods and techniques from various sources can be incorporated into the existing program.

Arithmetic Concepts: The manipulation of numbers will not be a goal for children so young; however, knowledge of numerosity and quantitative relationships should be an integral part of the curriculum. Consultants in the area of elementary school arithmetic will be able to suggest ways of building skills which will be necessary when the child enters the grades.

Art and Music: These two activities will be incorporated in the curriculum in all areas as well as being goal directed activities in and of themselves. Consultants can provide the needed boost to our creativity in choosing appropriate and satisfying media in art and meaningful musical activities.

Physical Development: Many of the formal and informal activities of the preschool will foster the development of both fine and gross muscle coordination. Consultants whose expertise is in physical education of the young child can guide planning in the creative use of equipment and active games for general physical development. Adaptive physical education may also be in order due to the wide variety of handicapping conditions which will be found among the children.

Preparation of Behavioral Objectives: As was mentioned in the section of individualized teaching and instruction, an essential task is the preparation of behavioral objectives: planning, executing and evaluating the preschool program. It was also mentioned that "behavior" must be "learned" by teachers. An educational consultant skilled in objectifying goals for children would be an invaluable resource when this phase of the program is initiated. With initial guidance, teachers

can become proficient in a short period of time.

In conclusion, there are a wide variety of consultants, both paid and unpaid, available to the preschool. The efficient use of these resource persons is essential to the success of the program. We have conceived of consultation as those activities of experts which have direct bearing on the children in the preschool and those designed as inservice training for teachers. The latter is probably the most important in that the carry over is for all children. We must, therefore, utilize all resources available to aid in improving our effectiveness with children.

Research Component

The word research is likely to bring about emotional reactions. Unfortunately, most of us have not had the opportunity to work through our anxieties about research, particularly statistics, so that all pieces of what seems an extraordinary complex set of procedures and mathematical calculations fit together into a logical and utilitarian way of presenting information. This experience is often reserved for those who are being trained as researchers. However, the cycle of investigation, dissemination and utilization of results is actually an integral part of current classroom procedure.

We are not in the business of occupying the child's school day with activities which may or may not yield results. But we are all vitally concerned with planning and efficiently executing instructional programs which are relevant to the child's needs in a complex social order and which will GET RESULTS! Research can move us toward these goals. By synthesizing findings from research studies and programs, deriving methods for applying these results, and then evaluating their effectiveness, we systematically add to our body of knowledge so we can GET RESULTS! This then is what research is: synthesizing information; deriving principles, devising methodology, application and evaluation. These activities are also the foundation of sound educational practice. Is there a distance between the teacher and the researcher? Perhaps it never has existed except in terms of opportunity to communicate and in the language of communication.

If we can agree that the goal of the Practitioner and the Researcher

are basically the same, we can assume there is also mutual responsibility: that of strengthening communication so we can more efficiently reach our goals!

All too often as we give direct service to children, we become so involved in solving the day by day problems which arise, that we fail to step back and take a look at the total picture. If we are able to stop from time to time and evaluate what is happening within the classroom, we will see the same problems coming up. Conversations in teachers' lounges or at meetings make us acutely aware of this fact. We are often forced to provide ourselves with answers or make decisions upon assumptions which could be in error, because a course of action must be taken then and there. In a sense, the practitioner is a researcher! Because of the setting in which he does research, he must fudge a bit with the "scientific method" and his findings are often limited to an "n" of one. But he is posing questions, finding solutions and replicating his findings. The practitioner's methods may be a bit unorthodox, somewhat inefficient and seldom documented, but he is carrying out classroom research. As an integral part of the educational team, the researcher can be helpful in implementing these queries.

Perhaps the single most important responsibility of the practitioner is the formulation of questions which need to be answered. What better place for this to occur than in a dynamic setting such as the classroom. Who are better qualified than those on the firing line dealing with learning and management problems as they actually arise? A teacher's duties to her students naturally limit the extent to which she can master the skills of experimental design and methodology.

But posing questions: why, she does this every day. It is the responsibility of the teacher to pose these questions to the researcher who has the knowledge and experience for efficiently finding the answers.

The researcher must frequently interact with practitioners so he will be aware of questions which need to be answered. Talking with the teachers and observing in classrooms is a must. Because of his special training, the researcher can often help teachers to formulate questions in such a way that they can be answered through techniques and procedures available. It is also essential that the results of such inquiries are interpretable and have some direct bearing upon the classroom operation - insofar as it is possible.

There is then mutual responsibility of practitioners and researchers to themselves, to each other as they work together and to exceptional children. By assuming this responsibility with deep commitment, we can then move from artistic endeavors to substantiated methodology. We will be able to teach children effectively and efficiently to meet the problems they face in learning and growing.

The educational problems of the multi-handicapped child are becoming well known to us who work with them. The child with multiple disabilities may be mentally retarded, have physical anomalies of various kinds, and be culturally deprived due to sensory loss and isolation. Specific identifiable problems arise from these disabling factors, but when found in combination, the problem of the multi-handicapped and his teachers are multiplied many times over. Through

research and practice we have been able to identify learning principles and teaching methodology which apply to specific situations and to children with certain conditions, but will these same principles apply when the conditions are found in combination and are interrelated? Our efforts with multi-handicapped children seem to make this assumption, which may be entirely false. It isn't an encouraging thought, but our modern approach to education is dedicated to displacing erroneous assumptions both in the learner and in the way he is guided in his learning. And so we must refine our knowledge through experimentation. Because we believe that growth and learning are developmental in nature, for teachers as well as for children, we can look forward to the day when we will have more answers to the problems of multiple disabilities.

The function of the special purpose preschool is primarily service oriented. Our direct service to children is designed to alleviate deficits which may be handicapping subsequent educational experiences. This task alone can be Herculean in scope. Program planning and execution will be a demanding task for the entire staff. What then can be the commitment of the project to research? In some cases a research component may be built into the project. That is, a person will be hired to carry out research and evaluative procedures. There is also a valuable resource in nearby colleges and universities who may welcome the project as a research site. It may be that the project will be closely associated with local educational agencies or systems which provide consultive and research services to federally supported

programs in the area. Every effort should be made to maintain continuous cooperation with research resources.

Research can be carried by staff members within the project itself as an integral part of programming. Establishing individual behavioral objectives for students and evaluating progress is applied research in its most basic form. Research often makes us think of complex mathematical formulas and calculations. This is not necessarily true. By stating goals and objectives, documenting methods and then evaluating change, we can arrive at objective data which can be replicated and reported in research terms.

The documentation of group change as a result of the overall program is a research activity of greatest importance. Most programs will evaluate children with a series of diagnostic instruments at the beginning of the school year. Measures of intelligence, adaptive behavior and special abilities tests may be administered, for the purpose of selection of grouping. Testing may be done by teachers or by consultants brought in for that specific purpose. By giving these tests again after a given period of time we may objectively evaluate progress as a result of the program. The normal course of development must be taken into account. This can be handled very easily so that gain scores as a result of the program can be demonstrated. Here is another reason why it is necessary to objectify what is being done with children.... If the program does "make a difference" in the way children function, we want to know what specific kinds of techniques and programs contribute to this end. We can then share our methods and procedures

with other people in the field who have similar goals for children and add to the general knowledge in the field. We often become so involved with programming that we fail to document our results or publish them for sharing. Every staff member should be encouraged to conduct individual research projects and write them up. The project as a whole must also assume the responsibility of documentation and reporting of methods, materials, programs used and the results gained. The commitment to a research component in the special purpose preschool is not really an added responsibility, but should rather be considered an integral part of the program. There are a number of resources available to implementation of such a program of research if time will be taken to find them. The time spent on research activities will be invaluable in terms of in-house evaluation, program planning, and building the body of knowledge relative to the multiply handicapped child.

Concluding Remarks

We have explored a number of areas together. These explorations are goal directed. They have been set down with a behavioral objective in mind.

Objective: To increase practical knowledge and positive attitudes of teachers in a special purpose preschool for children with multiple disabilities.

Competencies Involved: The ability to effectively plan and carry on a preschool program which will be meaningful to both students and teachers.

Method: Discriminating consumption of the preceding material tempered with existing knowledge and experience.

Evaluation: The effective and efficient operation of a preschool program where realistic behavioral objectives are set and subsequently achieved by children relative to their individual differences.

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